

Relatedness and learner autonomy: A case study of an adult refugee learning English in Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Ireland has only recently become a country of immigration and asylum. Provision of English language training is a priority both for refugees and for the host community. There has been very little research in Ireland on language provision for refugees. Wider studies of learning suggest that outcomes are enhanced by a classroom environment which fosters autonomous and self-determined behaviour. This paper presents the case of one individual from Moldova and examines his experience as a language learner particularly in terms of “relatedness”. The case study analyses his profile as an adult who struggled with his roles as refugee and student, but who continued to apply himself to the task of learning English and demonstrated increased motivation and progress. Data was collected by multiple techniques, including participant observation, audio interviews with students and teachers, closed- and open-format attitudinal questionnaires, and archival data from school records. The findings of the study suggest that the patterns of goal-setting observed contribute to some increased intrinsic motivation, and the development of internalized extrinsic motivation congruent with learner needs.

Introduction

Ireland has only recently become a country of immigration and asylum. For many years, Ireland’s airports and ferry terminals were packed with Irish citizens leaving to find work abroad. The “Celtic Tiger”, an extended and unprecedented period of economic growth, contributed to a reversal of this trend, and in the early 1990s, rates of emigration fell for the first time below those of immigration. This economic boom brought a large number of asylum-seekers to Ireland, as well as many other types of new arrivals including returnees and migrants from within the European Union, and beyond. The Irish government has therefore had to create immigration and integration policies and infrastructures in a limited period of time, including English language provision.

This paper presents a case study of an adult refugee learning English in Ireland, drawn from a wider ethnographic study (Carson, 2006) of thirteen learners at Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), the official provider of English as a Second Language classes for refugees in Ireland. The original study conducted at IILT was a qualitative, longitudinal investigation which sought to determine the motivational role of goal-setting in adult learners. During a twelve month period (2003–2004), multiple data-gathering techniques were employed including

participant observation, group interviews with learners, teacher interviews, attitudinal questionnaires, and archival research. The main research question of the project was to determine the motivational impact of a curriculum designed to encourage learner autonomy.

This empirical study concluded that whilst the process of setting and working towards personal goals seems to contribute positively towards learner motivation, the three basic psychological needs of self-determination theory (Deci, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci, 1995)—autonomy, competence and relatedness—are also an appropriate paradigm for understanding more about the motivational highs and lows of adult learners in the classroom. The principles of learner autonomy are closely related to the three psychological needs outlined in self-determination theory. The benefits of helping individuals achieve their full potential through taking responsibility for their own learning have been extensively discussed in both educational and psychological disciplines (Dam, 1995; Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Little, Ridley et al., 2002; Vansteenkiste, Simons et al., 2004). Ushioda (1996, p. 2) asserts that “autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners”. Little (2000, p. 25) argues that “developing learner autonomy reveals profound truths about the ways in which human beings learn, and these ways of learning reveal profound truths about how human beings are”. This interweaving of our basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the purposive nature of human activity, has powerful implications for our understanding of how we learn and why we learn.

One individual’s experience of a year of English language classes for adult refugees in Ireland is presented below, and discussed with reference to learner autonomy, interdependence and motivation. For the purposes of this discussion, the focus will be on our need to connect with others, in other words our interdependence or ‘relatedness’. My claim is that helping refugee learners make connections with others and with their host community through fulfilling basic psychological needs not only enhances learning outcomes but contributes to overall well-being and self-esteem. I argue that understanding the need for relatedness sheds light on how barriers may be broken down between classroom and real-life, often a challenging tasks for those involved in adult education in general and immigrant language provision in particular.

Motivation and goal-setting

A social cognitive view of motivation is as essential component of a set of ‘life skills’ (see e.g., Bandura, 1997, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Such life skills equip learners to take responsibility for their own actions and adopt an attitude of ongoing self-appraisal, allowing them to become healthy and engaged members of society. Goal-setting is related to motivation. Although we have an innate curiosity and capacity to appreciate the enjoyment intrinsic in many tasks and activities, human behaviour is also purposive. We can envisage future outcomes, and plan how to achieve these. The ability to develop a personal learning agenda and to work towards clear and optimally challenging goals is central to developing and sustaining the interest and energy we pour into activities, and the satisfaction and

success we obtain from them. Studies suggest that the process of selecting and achieving optimally challenging goals, that help us learn new things, contributes to our drive, sense of ability and our levels of achievement (Dweck, 1999; Järvelä & Salovaara, 2004; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Young, 2005).

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is a general theory of motivation and personality which focuses on the extent to which human behaviour is autonomous or controlled, that is, whether it is self-determined or imposed by external forces. Deci & Ryan argue that the wrong questions are asked about motivation. We wonder, for example, "how can we motivate others", rather than, "how can we create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?" (Deci, 1995, p. 10). Self-determination theory assumes that individuals are actors with innate tendencies to seek out challenges and integrate new experiences into their sense of self. The social environment is therefore of vital importance in either encouraging individuals to act in a self-determined manner, or in thwarting their natural tendency to control their own psychological growth. When individuals act in accordance with their own will, they act autonomously. However, external factors have a controlling influence on individual behaviour. It is the operation of will, "the capacity to choose behaviours based on inner desires and perceptions" (Deci, 1980, p. 5) that is the basis of self-determination.

The study of self-determination is based on the hypothesis that humans have three inherent psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Satisfying these three needs is a prerequisite for promoting self-determined behaviour. Deci (1995) describes this kind of behaviour as self-governing. The autonomous and self-determined individual acts freely and volitionally in accordance with him/herself. In this model, autonomy is the opposite of control: "When autonomous, people are fully willing to do what they are doing, and they embrace the activity with a sense of interest and commitment" (p. 2). The second fundamental need is for competence, the need to feel effective in one's environment. Deci asserts that feelings of competence result when individuals take on, and in their opinion, meet optimal challenges. Feeling competent depends on our ability to see linkages between our behaviour and its outcomes. The third innate need, and the focus of this paper, is relatedness. Individuals do not develop in isolation but in interaction with a social world; they need to relate to each other. Deci argues that people need to integrate a sense of self and the world around them in order to feel truly themselves.

Self-determined behaviour is discernible in individuals. Optimum functioning, a sense of well-being, curiosity and vitality are all characteristics of self-determined behaviour. In the context of education, self-determination theory is concerned with self-endorsed behaviour, promoting interest in learning and confidence in ability (Deci, Vallerand et al., 1991; Noels, Pelletier et al., 2000), which in turn leads to enhanced learning outcomes (Black & Deci, 2000; Miserandino, 1996). The classroom setting does not always encourage such behaviour, and some classrooms may hinder learners from assuming charge of the learning process. Ryan & Deci (2000) argue that when their natural propensity for self-determination is frustrated, individuals become passive, alienated and even hostile.

This case study focuses on the need for 'relatedness', or interdependence. The assumption that autonomy is independence or self-sufficiency is misplaced (Chirkov, Kim et al., 2003). As Little & Dam (1998) note,

the independence that we exercise through our developed capacity for autonomous behaviour is always conditioned and constrained by our inescapable interdependence. In contexts of formal learning as elsewhere, we necessarily depend on others even as we exercise our independence.

Within the context of immigration, much of the policy debate surrounding integration has focused on the need to help individuals relate to their host community, and to help the host community relate to new arrivals. 'Relatedness' has to do with connections, associations and commonalities. These societal links between individuals are actualized through families, friendships, workplaces and social activities. Often the language classroom is one step removed from such networks; whilst role-plays and communicative routines are rehearsed, individuals often remain 'unrelated' to social situations in the language of the host community in practice. Unable to or afraid of relating to others on a large-scale results in the creation of closed groups of speakers of other languages, who become self-sufficient, communities apart.

Adult refugees learning English in Ireland

Statistics from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner in Ireland (ORAC, 2006) show only 39 requests for asylum in the early nineties, but a dramatic increase occurred in subsequent years. In 1996, there were 1,179 asylum applications, and in 2002 this had increased to 11,634 applications. Numbers have since decreased; there were 4,265 applications in 2004, and 4,323 in 2005. The table below (Irish Refugee Council, 2006) indicates the top countries of origin of individuals awarded refugee status, by number of applications (at first instance and at appeal), in 2004.

Refugee status grants people rights and entitlements similar to those of Irish citizens. Amongst other entitlements, they are able to work or start their own business, apply for housing, social welfare and travel documents, avail of vocational training and English language classes. Being a refugee is a difficult and complex life situation (Fong, 2004; Furuto, 2004; Torode et al., 2001). Refugees come to Ireland from a changing mosaic of countries in turmoil and upheaval.

Table 1

Origin of refugees in Ireland, 2004

Top countries of origin of refugees in 2004		
1. Somalia	6. Zimbabwe	11. D. R. Congo
2. Iraq	7. Nigeria	12. Albania
3. Sudan	8. Afghanistan	13. Moldova
4. China	9. Ukraine	14. Kosovo
5. Iran	10. Russia	

The asylum process is long and complicated, marked by “fear and uncertainty, frustration and distress” (ibid., p. 61). Once registered as a refugee, a whole new range of issues is encountered as people try to find their feet in an alien society.

Refugees, like other minority populations on the fringes of society, are vulnerable to loneliness, anxiety and depression (Fong, 2004). Without sufficient proficiency in English, some refugees may never access employment or anything more than minimum wage jobs, and become victims of the disadvantages which accompany poverty, such as low self-esteem, loss of dignity, mental and physical health problems. This vicious circle leads to a culture of dependency and prevents refugees participating in processes of Irish society. Refugees, unlike some other minority groups, are individuals who may not have left their homes by choice and have taken the risk of seeking new life elsewhere (Furuto, 2004; Summerfield, 2002). The psychological and emotional effects of this disruption mean they may not have positive attitudes to the host community. Some may be relieved to settle in Ireland and look forward to founding a new life here; others may be angry that they had to leave their country and look forward to returning there at the first possible opportunity.

Although there are a number of different methods and approaches to language instruction, it is difficult to see how anything other than a learner-centred approach to language learning would be appropriate for adult refugees. Past language provision in Ireland for refugees has included mainstream English as a Foreign Language classes alongside European visiting students, ill suited to the needs of immigrants, especially refugees. Language instruction for Vietnamese Programme refugees in past decades was severely lacking and inappropriate (Maguire, 2004), provided by special educators trained in teaching the deaf. The Irish government has had to play “catch-up” in the field of English language provision, given the rapid changes in the country’s demography.

Refugees’ experience of language instruction is likely to be mixed, ranging from those who will have already learned English in a formal setting to those who will have picked it up naturalistically during their asylum process. Some refugees in Ireland are highly trained professionals in their home country; others may not have completed primary education and may be semi-literate. Some may have experience of strict, rote learning; some may never have encountered female teachers; some may come with negative experiences of school.

The body of learner autonomy research suggests that the best approach to language learning for refugees will lie with the learners: their perceived needs, their reasons for learning English, their interests and ambitions. In the case of adult refugees from a wide range of different cultural and educational backgrounds, taking learners’ own needs and goals into account appears to be the only satisfactory means of determining their knowledge base as they enter the learning process, and ensuring effective learning occurs out of their existing knowledge.

Integrate Ireland Language and Training

Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) (www.iilt.ie) is the government-designated body responsible for co-ordinating English as a Second Language provision for adult refugees in Ireland. Adult learners of different nationalities with refugee status or leave to remain are entitled to attend English classes at one of IILT's centres throughout Ireland. Students attending General English classes enrol for a full-time course of twenty contact hours per week over a term of four months.

In 2004, 529 learners were enrolled in General English classes. Of these, 59% were male and 41% female. Learners attending classes run by IILT tend to reflect the top countries of origin of refugees described above. An integral part of IILT's approach to English as a Second Language provision for refugees is the use of the European Language Portfolio in all classes and for all proficiency levels, encouraging students to take responsibility for their individual learning. IILT aims to help learners become autonomous, and teachers systematically encourage students to assume responsibility for the content and the modalities of the course, as well as encouraging ongoing self-evaluation and reflection on the learning process. Using the Milestone version of the ELP, learners are assisted in developing individual learning agendas which correspond to their personal needs, and are introduced to the notion of goal-setting in the classroom.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) was designed, among other things, to promote learner autonomy in the language classroom (Council of Europe, 2004). It is a learning tool which can be adapted to different groups of students and target languages. Briefly, the Portfolio contains three sections: (i) a Language Passport which enables learners to record their achievements and proficiency in the different languages which make up their linguistic repertory, including formal qualifications, extended periods of L2 use, and a self-assessment of proficiency for each language; (ii) a Language Biography is used for goal-setting and ongoing self-assessment, and is designed to help the learner to fix goals, plan learning activities and reflect on the learning experience; and (iii) a Language Dossier, where the owner's work is stored, thus functioning as a "showcase" for elements of learning which they feel best represent their abilities and skills in the target language. These three parts are contained in a folder which passes into the ownership of the learner.

The Milestone project (Milestone ELP, 2006) has developed versions of the European Language Portfolio for adult migrants. It is the result of collaboration between partners from five different European countries, seeking to develop autonomous learning in migrants learning the language of their host community. Milestone ELPs have been developed in English, German, Dutch, Swedish and Finnish. Milestone ELPs have the same tripartite structure as all other ELPs. However, there are some differences deriving from the needs of its specific learner group. The Milestone Language Biography is divided into two sections. The first relates to the owner's previous language learning and intercultural experiences, and the relationship between the learner's previous life in their country of origin, and their new life in the host country (Milestone ELP, 2006, p. 6). The self-assessment grid common to all ELPs asks learners to assess their proficiency

in all the languages they know; a simplified self-assessment grid is also included for learners with low proficiency. The first section of the Biography includes an assessment of "Past, Present and Future", comparing activities, interests and hobbies of the learner in their home country and in the new host country, as well as questions about the learner's experience of speaking the language of the host community since their arrival. The second part of the Language Biography contains checklists of "Can do" statements describing tasks in the target language, as well as some specific components tailored to the needs of adult immigrants, asking learners about their expectations, degrees of cultural awareness and learning strategies.

Ethnographic research project at Integrate Ireland Language and Training

This case study is drawn from a wider study of thirteen refugees learning English (Carson, 2006), investigating the motivational role of goal-setting in the language classroom. I conducted fieldwork from May 2003 to April 2004 at IILT's headquarters in Dublin city. The aim of the study was to determine the motivational role of goal-setting in a context where the curriculum content and tasks were generated from learners' needs and learners' targets, using the European Language Portfolio as a tool for both individual and class planning, implementing and reviewing the curriculum. Multiple methods of data collection techniques were employed, including participant observation, audio interviews, attitudinal questionnaires and archival research. I was involved in overt participant observation as a language assistant in two classrooms for twelve months, preceded by a pilot period of three months when I visited several other classrooms. I attended class one day per week, and kept a detailed logbook of notes. Four semi-structured audio interviews of one-hour duration were recorded during my fieldwork, as well as a twenty-item closed-format attitudinal questionnaire administered four times throughout the year, and one open-format attitudinal questionnaire.

Supplementary data sources were teacher interviews, student records and class documents. Interviews were transcribed using a simplified version of the Jefferson (1992) Conversation Analysis conventions. I employed a narrative approach in the discussion of my findings, and produced an account of motivational highs and lows centred on four specific points in time throughout the year. These were discussed in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the goals or linkages set by learners between the classroom and their everyday life in Ireland. In my discussion below, I indicate in brackets the source of the data cited. These are reproduced in full in the appendix to my original study.

The aim of this particular case study is to draw out some aspects of one learner's experience in the language classroom which illustrate how need for 'relatedness' can contribute to our understanding of creating the right conditions for individuals to motivate themselves.

Nicolae Yenko

Nicolae Yenko¹, from Moldova, was born in 1973. At the time of fieldwork, he was married with one child. He had worked in construction in his home country, and also in France before arriving in Ireland. He had completed secondary education, and three years of technical college at third level in engineering/construction studies. He spoke French and Russian as well as Romanian. Nicolae started English classes at IILT on 3 September 2003, “reserved and a bit moody”² (end-of-term confidential administrative report). He was sent a warning letter about his attendance in the first week of term³. His attitudes to Ireland seemed somewhat distant. In December 2003, we discovered during class discussion that he had been stopped by immigration police at Dublin airport. According to his account, he had been stopped in a rather forcible manner, although he recounted his experience lightly. Nicolae was hostile to authoritarian regimes, and commented often how he appreciated the ‘democracy’ of the classroom: how he liked being able to make choices, for example, choosing what the class would work on next.

I was aware he had spent time in France earlier in his life, and my first impression was that he wanted to settle in Ireland and stop moving around: “Has travelled quite a bit, keen to stay in Ireland now with his family” (observer’s logbook, 22 November 2003). However, during a group interview, it appeared that Nicolae was not sure whether he wanted to remain in Ireland:

Maybe I want to, you know, change jobs. I don’t know. I don’t like too much this country, you know, the cold. I prefer to live in France. Very good country, for me, because I know the language. (Audio interview, 11 November 2003).

Language is one of the most serious obstacles for refugees who arrive in Ireland (Collins, 2002, p. 35). A Home Office report in the UK (Home Office, 1999) states that language is the key to integration, and that knowledge of English is closely related to an immigrant’s ability to obtain full economic participation in the host community (Casciani, 2003). Gaining an adequate mastery of English is therefore one of the most important steps they can take to take control of their lives, to integrate into their new community, and to access training and employment (Torode et al., 2001, p. 73).

Although Nicolae’s first week seemed inauspicious, by October he appeared much more comfortable and in better spirits. On 22 October, I wrote that initially, he appeared “reticent” and “hostile”, but that he “opened up incredibly over the last few weeks” (observer’s logbook). I also noted that he had some issues with authority. I commented that he had “no problem speaking out now [...] now that he understands how the system works”.

Studies of adult education report a number of barriers related to a return to formal instruction (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 35). These barriers include dispositional or psycho-social obstacles. Adults who return to formal education

¹ Names have been changed to protect identities.

² All data from participants is cited verbatim.

³ Students at IILT were required to maintain their attendance and punctuality at satisfactory levels on a weekly basis, maintaining at least 85% attendance rates.

often feel they have regressed “back to school”, and experience feelings of insecurity and inferiority when they return to the classroom and are faced with a teacher who is academically “superior” to them, and may also be much younger than them. Adults may have very rigid ideas about how to learn, their own intelligence, and the best way to learn (Brindley, 1984). Adults too may exhibit a “tired of school” attitude often seen in younger learners, especially if they have had negative experiences of formal education in the past. They may also expect a school-like atmosphere, including a teacher teaching from the front of the class, whilst learners learn sitting in rows taking notes (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 22). They may find it difficult to work with adults who have a different construct of their student role. A range of expectations engendered by this constructed role of student may lead some adults to expect an experience similar to their previous schooling, others may expect an entirely different situation with a less formal approach. Although the student role is often constructed out of some elements of childhood, adults bring their own maturity, wider horizons and knowledge of self to the process of language learning (ibid., p. 57), and so often make their own decisions about how, in their own way, to make the most of an educational system.

How did the “system” in this particular English language classroom work? The four-hour daily class usually started in a plenary session with a short discussion led by the teacher asking for news. Students usually worked in small groups which varied in size and make-up according to the task, or in pairs, moving the furniture around to suit. Students often chose their own group, but sometimes the teacher changed the composition, placing more proficient learners alongside less proficient learners, or breaking up groups of students with a common L1. Nicolae frequently worked in a pair with Ivan, from Romania. Although they both spoke Romanian, they formed a positive collaboration with Nicolae’s confidence and risk-taking counter-acting Ivan’s reticence and lack of confidence. Class ended with a final plenary session, answering any remaining questions, and closed with a few minutes of small-talk about plans for that evening or topics in the news. The first task of each new term was to draw up a class contract. Students formulated and negotiated collectively a set of rules, guidelines and objectives for the term ahead. This was an introduction to the idea of goal-setting which formed the basis of all curriculum planning, methodology and assessment at IILT. Learners were introduced to the cycle of goal-setting through use of their ELP to choose course content and determine their own progress.

The ELP underpinned the way the curriculum was generated and implemented in the classrooms I observed. Each student maintained their own Portfolio in an A4 ringbinder, which was kept in class. Target-setting sessions were conducted on a weekly basis, with group and individual targets negotiated within class and displayed on posters. These targets provided the course content for the week ahead, and included topics and activities such as ‘going to the doctor’, ‘my child at school’, ‘driving in Ireland’, ‘elections’. A combination of authentic materials and worksheets were used in class, from a bank of documents compiled by IILT’s teachers and students. At the end of a week’s activities, students reviewed these targets and determined how well they had accomplished them, or to what

extent they were able to perform targets independently. All course documents and worksheets were stored in this folder. The Portfolio thus acted in lieu of a textbook, as learners were able to look back over past work. Other sections of the ELP included reflections on life before coming to Ireland, first experiences on arrival and current thoughts on life in Ireland. 'Housekeeping' activities were also included in the Portfolio. Rather than teachers alone maintaining attendance records, students kept their own records in their Portfolio, and calculated their own attendance percentages each week and term, to be submitted to the school's administration. Students compiled their own thematic vocabulary lists and pronunciation sheets, based on templates provided by their teacher. Regular one-on-one sessions between teacher and student were conducted to discuss individual progress.

Despite demonstrating some negative behavioural patterns at the beginning of term, Nicolae seemed to appreciate the democracy of the classroom and the opportunity to make choices. Although he seemed a little uncomfortable to be back in the classroom, he appeared to have the study skills and drive to acquire quickly a working knowledge of English. As the term progressed, Nicolae began to relax and engage with the class. His teacher wrote that he "got into the mood and started joining in more". By November, in his audio interview, he thought he had made some progress, "in some new words, now I speak a great deal". His teacher believed that he had the potential to work quickly through the proficiency levels at IILT:

I thought six months in the system and out there working. I would have thought at the beginning, ok, he's a linguist, he speaks what five languages, he just needs a bit of orientation, or a bit of a breathing space as he sorts out his other stuff, and he'll be out of here in six months (interview with class teacher).

He appeared to be equipped to learn English, and outwardly gave the impression of a motivated student: "he just seems...he's highly motivated, he came in, he seemed to be halfway on the road already" (interview with class teacher).

Although Nicolae participated in the goal-setting activities in class and used his ELP, he had no defined personal goals at the start of his time at IILT beyond simply learning English. When I asked him about his plans after IILT, he replied, "I don't know, I can't now, I don't know the future" and "For now I don't think about the future" (group interview). He did not believe that he would ever speak English fluently. English was only part of his linguistic profile; a Moldovan speaker of Romanian, he also spoke fluent Russian and French. An "English-only" rule was enforced in the classroom, but during breaktime and lunchtime, students used their L1 or other shared languages to chat with each other. In a group interview, Nicolae said he was not completely committed to learning English well:

NICOLAE: Yes, I want, for me, I want to learn, uh, 80%
 ROSE⁴: 100%!
 ((laughter))

⁴ Female student from the Democratic Republic of Congo who participated in the same audio interview as Nicolae.

NICOLAE: No, because 100%. Because I don't speak Romanian 100%. Some words I don't understand in Romanian. Is my mother language and I don't understand. In this school, I speak Russian, you know, and at home I speak Romanian [...]. For me, nobody speak very good Russian 100%. Romanian, some words, Alina⁵ speak I ask Alina, you know, about bad words, because you know, I don't (pratique) this. I don't think I will speak English 100% in Ireland. Maybe my my children will speak, no me.

Yet he also thought that in a year's time, his English would have greatly improved: "I think in one year times, will be very good for me, many more English, good" and "for me I want to learning very good. If I want, si je peux" (group interview). But in the same interview, Nicolae argued that speaking just enough English to cope was sufficient, and that the safety net of Social Welfare would catch anyone who was unemployed. In our interview in November, his attitudes to learning English were mixed, and he gave the impression that he was attending class by default:

don't like, coming to school, for learning. For learning. If you don't want to stay in home and can't no work, then is good (group interview).

He did not like learning English, but acknowledged that it was important for anyone living in Ireland:

NICOLAE: don't like English because it is hard, you know, but is very important for the (.) this is first language in the world, very important. If you come, living here, what's the word?

LORNA: obligatory?

NICOLAE: yeah obligatory

Nicolae did not seem to enjoy life in Ireland nor did he seem to want to integrate into Irish society, "for some people, Irish people is difficult, for me is very difficult" (group interview). He had no firm plans either to complete his language study or to remain in Ireland. Nicolae seemed to be learning English because he had no choice, he had not found a job and he preferred to attend class than remain at home. His motivation may have been hampered by his attitudes to living in Ireland. He knew that learning the language of the host community was important, yet his sense of relatedness, or integration, was marred by a dislike for Ireland (or perhaps a preference for France).

Nicolae displayed these issues in his conversation during our audio interview. Rose argued extensively with him during the interview. She stated that simply taking classes because they were available, or even learning just enough English to cope, was unacceptable to her. Part of her debate with Nicolae was about a hypothetical person who didn't speak English and was employed as a driver. She pointed out that the low income jobs favoured by immigrants that do not require much English were not adequate if the worker falls sick, "maybe he lose his leg". Nicolae's response was that he would be taken care of by Social Welfare, "if he lose his leg, it's for social pay!" Rose was adamant that this was the wrong

⁵ Female classmate from Romania.

attitude, and that even in the case of an accident, the worker would still have to know some English to be able to cope: "If today he go to hospital [...] he have to speak [...] and this and this and that, and my wife, you know?" Later in the interview, conversation again turned to the importance of speaking the language of the host country in order to integrate fully. Nicolae continued to contest this point. Rose stressed, "If you are driver you have to speak English, because you are a driver here. Maybe you have some problem, if Garda⁶ came, you can say, I'm driver!"

The reaction of the majority population of Irish nationals has an effect on the minority population of refugees. Much of the Irish population is largely uninformed about the reality of immigration to Ireland. Their responses have been "ambiguous, complex and varied" (Torode et al., 2001, p. 59). Some may be suspicious and resentful of the arrival of what appear to be large numbers of outsiders and foreigners, especially those of different race and ethnicity. There has been considerable media coverage of the new arrivals to Ireland, some of it negative (Mac Éinrí, 2001, p. 6). There is confusion about the terms used: e.g., refugees, asylum seekers, economic immigrants and illegal immigrants (Torode et al., 2001, p. 35). There have been fears that refugees are welfare-dependent and exploiting Irish society. These fears are sometimes substantiated. However, refugees easily feel excluded and isolated (Collins, 2002, p. 37), and may perceive discrimination against themselves, even if this is not the case, which can in turn generate feelings of resentment towards the host community (Little, 2000, p. 10). This process of marginalization means refugees may not feel they belong in Ireland, leading to closed ethnic groups and ghettoization in Irish cities (Torode et al., 2001, p. 59). Ireland has been an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic monocultural state with very few minorities and foreign-born residents of non-Irish extraction.

I have argued that Nicolae seemed to demonstrate hostility in his attitudes to living in Ireland. He also gave the impression that he was not studying English by choice, rather his choice was affected by external factors beyond his control. He had no specific goals for the future. However, the move to the next class level in January 2004 seemed to bring about some changes in Nicolae's attitudes to learning English and attending school. His September–December 2003 report from his teacher read:

"Well done Nicolae, you have come a long way. Thank you for everything and best of luck". The confidential administrative report included: "spoken [...] really improved but needs to concentrate on writing". Nicolae made a good first impression on his new teacher in January.

The same teacher wrote in a report to me in January 2004:

Nicolae's attitude to his English I imagine is similar to his attitude to anything he does: he wants to do a good job. He enjoys making connections between his existing linguistic knowledge and new information encountered. Nicolae will work at an activity until it is finished or until he loses interest in it.

⁶ Garda is an abbreviation for *An Garda Síochána*, Ireland's National Police Force.

In November, Nicolae had told me he had no idea what he would do in the future. However, his responses in the open-format attitudinal questionnaire administered in April 2004 showed that he had since developed some specific, personal goals: "For me personally, I want to learn two targets, about construction and new words from Driving Theory Test to get Driver Licence". Nicolae moved from a position in which he could not articulate any goals to a position in which he was able to articulate two personal, specific and achievable goals. When asked whether he was learning what he wanted to learn, Nicolae replied, "Not everything I want to learn, for example, I want to learn more about construction". Although feeling in control of his learning, "I can choose what target I want to learn", Nicolae pointed out that choosing learning content as a group could be difficult, "Is not easy to choose targets because many students have a different idea about this" (open questionnaire). However, as Nicolae himself recognised, when learners choose their own goals, and achieve them they feel competent and in charge: "I make [myself] more motivated when I want to learn what I want" (open questionnaire). His final confidential administrative report read:

Nicolae has strong reading, comprehension and communication skills. He completes class tasks with determination and will always clarify anything he doesn't understand. He is an intelligent student and a pleasure to have in class. Small grammatical errors hamper written and spoken production, as I think communication is perceived as more important than accuracy. At the time of writing, Nicolae remains in Ireland, in full employment in the construction industry.

Discussion

The longitudinal empirical investigation conducted at IILT yielded a large body of data. Subjected to qualitative content analysis (thematically, by individual learner, chronologically), the narrative account of the original study focussed on emergent patterns of behaviour and attitudes within the paradigm of self-determination theory's basic psychological needs. The changes in Nicolae's behaviour in the classroom, documented over twelve months, were discernible improvements in his attendance and punctuality, his attitude to attending class, his relationships with his classmates, and in his responsibility for his own language learning and ambitions beyond the classroom. In the following discussion, I will focus on the interdependent and empowering consequences of encouraging autonomy (and thus interdependent relationships with others), and explore how a curriculum based on goal-setting seemed to help students relate to their host community.

Learner autonomy has two important implications for my discussion, namely that learning is both social and political. Turning firstly to the social aspect of learning, it is important to stress that autonomous learners who gradually take responsibility for their own progress do not do so in a vacuum, independently of others. I have already mentioned above that, as Little (1991) stresses, autonomous learning is essentially interdependent, working in a social group and interacting with significant others, engaging in meaningful interactions.

The move from isolated individual to social participant was achieved in this particular case study, even on the most fundamental level of attendance. The literature on adult education and immigration education reveals a consistently high drop-out rate. Nicolae attended one year of full-time English language classes, a successful outcome in itself. The change from isolated individual to active participant in group activities was a further discernible change. The concept of relatedness has some useful currency in understanding this shift in behaviour and attitudes. Nicolae initially arrived in class, certainly as many adults have done, wishing they were in the workplace and not behind a desk. However, as time progressed, Nicolae established relationships within the class. The central organizing principle of regular group work and pair work resulted in regular horizontal interactions between learners, rather than the dominant vertical model of classroom interaction between individual students and teacher. Nicolae struck up a firm working friendship with Ivan and other group members. Relatedness, a sense of complicity and togetherness, is often the factor that keeps workers in their place of employment, even when their job satisfaction is low. Encouraging autonomous learning also tends to encourage group tasks, exchanges and meaningful interaction between peers. This facilitates the type of authentic relatedness that occurs naturally in other domains such as the workplace, sports clubs or churches; creating situations where learners have time, space and the opportunity to relate to others in meaningful ways.

Secondly, learner autonomy has political implications for the power structures which make up educational institutions and society. Handing responsibility over to the learner is an act of empowerment, which, if not followed up by the learner assuming responsibility beyond the classroom, is meaningless. It is difficult to envisage individuals acquiring the capacity to account for their own actions and acting to meet personal needs in one domain (the classroom) whilst remaining dependent and purposeless in other domains (life outside the classroom).

This case study may also be illuminated by examining the influence of a curriculum centred on goal-setting through use of the European Language Portfolio. Studies of goal-setting (Manderlink & Harackiewicz, 1984; Serra de Lemos & Gonçalves, 2004; Young, 2005) suggest that optimal behaviour and achievement is enhanced within a context of setting regular, achievable learning goals. In this case study, Nicolae became involved in setting goals, using descriptors in the ELP, on a weekly basis for a period of one year. It would seem that learners who have never set goals previously take time to understand that there is more to learning English than the goal of simply 'learning English'. Nicolae also developed two specific targets (learning vocabulary about construction and for the Driving Theory Test), whereas a few months previously he had no specific goals beyond just learning English. Nicolae moved from exhibiting manifest boredom to demonstrating motivated and self-directed behaviour and working on at least two articulated personal goals. The task-based curriculum at IILT, using the ELP, drew on 'Can do' statements to help learners articulate and analyse what exactly they were able to achieve in English, and what they aimed to achieve. Goal-setting through the ELP appeared to act as a bridge between the classroom (where 'learning English' is initially seen as a target in itself) and the real world,

where tasks such as dealing with officials, coping with hospital visits, describing past lives and future plans are in fact the types of situations learners need to be able to engage in. For this particular student, real-world tasks of obtaining a driving licence and learning how to talk about his trade entered the classroom. Bridging the artificial divide between classroom and real life means that "school knowledge" (Barnes, 1976, p. 81), or knowledge which someone else presents, becomes "action knowledge", knowledge incorporated for use in real life. Norton Peirce (1995, p. 26) argues that second language teachers need to help learners claim the right to speak outside the classroom. In this case study, I suggest that the ELP provided a tool for relating the task of learning English to the learner, and relating the learner to the new world outside the classroom, helping individuals to make their own voices heard in ways similar to their interactions, negotiations and discussions within the classroom.

Relatedness is an innate psychological need within self-determination theory, the need to engage with the world around us. I have argued above that this need to connect assumes particular relevance in the case of immigrant learners, where the process of feeling 'related' to the surrounding social milieu is markedly different from the experience of the majority of the population, as in the case of the student discussed above. Ryan & Deci (2000, p. 71) argue that in different situations throughout an individual's lifetime, "intrinsic motivation [is] more likely to flourish in contexts characterized by a sense of security and relatedness". They also argue that this sense of relatedness is particularly important when activities hold no intrinsic interest for the individual, but rather hold extrinsic value. Externally motivated activities are more likely to be successful when the surrounding community stimulates feelings of relatedness (p. 73). The importance of these findings cannot be overstated in the context of immigrant learners. Norton Peirce (1995) suggests that rather than using traditional definitions of motivation in the immigrant context, the most appropriate way of understanding the relationship between individual and language is the concept of 'investment', which "attempts to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world. It conceives of the language learner as having a complex social identity and multiple desires" (p. 17). Any individual's story is contradictory and full of non sequiturs, and the case study above is no exception. Nicolae's relationship with learning English, attending class and seeking out the best for himself and his family reflects the complex social relationships that characterize us all.

Conclusion

Learning English is essential for adult refugees in Ireland. From the perspective of the host community, equipping refugees with language skills means they are more likely to access training and employment, to become less welfare-dependent, to participate in their local community and add their voice to an increasingly multicultural chorus, thus combating racism and contributing to democratic processes. From the perspective of the refugee, learning English is a liberating process of making one's voice heard. Individuals move from passive recipients

to active producers, and take charge of their own lives. Some of these steps are simple: passing a driving test, using a bank card, being able to complain about poor services. Other steps, such as putting down roots in a new community, establishing a credit history, participating fully in a child's education, are more demanding. Learning English may have an important psychological impact, redressing exclusion, alienation and depression; speaking English helps refugees take control of their lives.

Nicolae Yenke experienced many of the problems encountered by adult learners in the classroom. Although he made good progress in English, and set more concrete goals for his life in Dublin, during the first months of fieldwork he did not appear to make the kind of connections with the world around him that contribute to the self-determined behaviour and optimum functioning described by Deci and his collaborators. Yet by the end of my fieldwork, he had several concrete personal goals to work towards, he completed one year of full-time English language classes, and ultimately found full-time employment in the job of his choice.

To return to the wider discussion of whether human behaviour is self-determined (autonomous) or controlled by external events, factors and people, Deci (1980) claims the correct question to ask about motivation is "how can people create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?" Nicolae's response to the final questionnaire administered during my fieldwork is informative. I asked: how do you make yourself more motivated? His response was: "when I want to learn what I want". Nicolae's articulation of his own will, "the capacity to choose behaviours based on inner desires and perceptions" (p. 5), suggests that this student had satisfied at least some of the basic conditions for autonomous, self-determined behaviour.

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